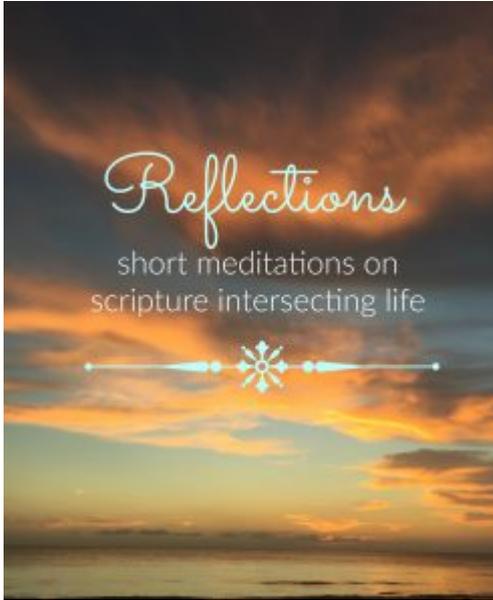


Reflections #20, Your Promised Land



Today's verse is Nehemiah 9:31, but if you have time, read all of Chapter 9.

It helps to know a bit of Israel's journey to the promised land as we discuss this reflection.

Three thoughts stand out to me from Nehemiah's reflection on Israel's history.

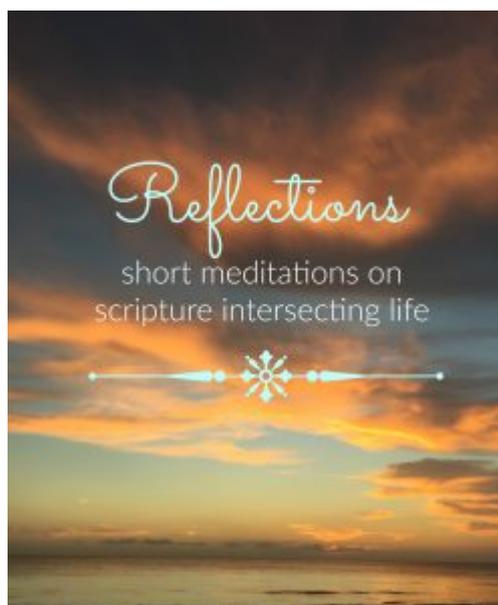
- 1) God had set aside the promised land for Israel, but they still had to go in and take possession of it.
- 2) God sustained them in their exile on the way to the promised land.
- 3) Once they were in the promised land, their sin caused them to be taken from their promised land as *slaves* to a foreign country.

Even though I don't like to admit it, my reactions to life's circumstances aren't always that different from the Israelites'. Listen below with Only By Prayer to see how this may apply to your life too.

Feel free to leave a comment, and if you'd like, [subscribe to our podcast](#) on iTunes.

Jane

Reflections #16: First Things First



short meditations on scripture intersecting life

Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests,

and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

The backstory for this verse is that the Israelites had been released from exile and were back in Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of God. I can only imagine the feelings the older exiles must have felt after living for many decades as servants in Babylon. To set foot in their homeland again must have been such a joyful time. And I wonder about the younger ones who had been born in captivity, and Babylon was all they knew. I'm sure they had heard stories of their homeland and to see it for the first time was an experience they would never forget.

The First Thing They Built Was ...



After they were settled, they started building the temple. They needed to put first things first, and they did because the very first thing they built was the altar so they could make their burnt offerings to the Lord. They needed to have a way to take care of the sin problem between them and the Lord.

And we need to do the same thing when we sin. We need to

“rebuild our own altars” too. We need to confess our sin and be restored.

Join Jane from Only By Prayer on today’s podcast by listening below. You can also [subscribe on iTunes](#) to have each new podcast sent right to your device.

Thanks for listening, and please leave your thoughts below.

Jane

How Do Christians Fall Into Sin?



(I originally wrote this post for [Ask God Today](#), and Brenda has graciously let me repost it here!)

Every person, every Christ-follower struggles with sin—whether we recognize it or not. While we tend to think of sin as being hideous and repulsive, which it is, it often masquerades as beauty and light and goodness as shown in 2 Corinthians 11:14. “And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” If it feels good, looks good, smells good, it must be good, we reason.

What *is* clear about sin is that it is instigated by the devil (I John 3:8). God warns us, as he did Cain in Genesis 4:7, “But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

That sounds direct enough, so why do so many believers become entangled in sin? Well, Satan knows our flaws and finagles circumstances targeted to our weak areas. Let’s consider four specific ways Christ followers can get bogged down in sin.

1. **Busyness is the Bane of our Society**

Throughout the Bible, God points out the importance of His children spending time with Him. Jesus modeled this for us. Mark 1:35 says that “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Author Bob Sorge calls prayer “the constant calibration of the soul.”

I love this word picture “calibration of the soul.”

[When we pray, God holistically fine tunes us—our souls, our spirits, our minds, and our bodies.](#)



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When we pray, God holistically fine tunes us—our souls, our spirits, our minds, and our bodies. He adjusts our thinking to His. Immanuel prayer calls this “thought rhyming.” Surely if Jesus, who was also divine, needed this time, how much more do we? Yet many of us start our days without the calibration of our souls. Why is that?

Frankly, many of us are just too busy. We’re consumed with family and job responsibilities or mesmerized by entertainment. We simply don’t set aside the time. The other day I got up early because I had several pressing deadlines. I remember thinking to myself as I was getting ready to write a post on praying, “I don’t have time for my quiet time today; I better just get started writing!” What is wrong with that attitude? I certainly needed a recalibration at that point!

When we don’t sit at Jesus’ feet on a regular basis, our souls shrivel up and

[The lure of the world pulls us away from the call of the Word.](#)



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the lure of the world pulls us away from the call of the Word. We are vulnerable to temptations and attacks because we don’t have our armor on.

2. Natural Weaknesses

Another reason Christians fall into sin is because of our inherent weaknesses. Just as we each have gifts and strengths,

we also have character flaws. In her study [Armor of God](#), Priscilla Shirer tells us we would be wise to know our weaknesses and our strengths, because Satan will attack us in both of these areas.

We need to identify our weaknesses so that we are alert to this area of attack. An area of weakness in my life has been fear, and it took several years for God to heal this. Still today, I keep a close watch on this area in my life.

3. **Oppression from the Enemy**

Thirdly, if we don't overcome our weaknesses, they can turn into strongholds, a prison inside of us that keeps others from being able to reach us.



Strongholds don't develop overnight, but rather over time, from allowing wrong thinking, wrong believing, and wrong living to go unchecked. The Holy Spirit will always warn us, but **we have the choice of whom we listen to**. Strongholds that aren't uprooted can turn into oppression, a state where our mind and emotions are tormented relentlessly by the enemy.

4. **Pride Goeth Before a Fall**

Finally, many Christians also fall into sin because of pride. We think "I've got this; I can handle this temptation," when instead we should do as 2 Timothy 2:22 says, "Flee the evil desires of youth." Did you notice that God did not say "Stay and fight the temptations of youth (or middle age or old age)"? We are to FLEE from temptations.

Our pride tells us to stay and beat it, but God knows that temptation is dangerous. Do not knowingly put yourself in the path of temptation, and if you find yourself there, get out of Dodge as fast as you can before it gets you. Do not try to rationalize sin. Over the years, the news has spotlighted many Christians who thought they were immune to the lure of sin and paid for it with their ministries, their witnesses, and their families. Don't be the next one.

Any one of these four situations can cause a believer to wind up in serious sin. But I'd also like to consider one other special circumstance.

A Word About Suffering

A trauma in our lives can leave us vulnerable to falling into sin if we don't suffer in the right way. This may sound crazy, but there is a healthy way and an unhealthy way to walk through a tragedy in our lives. In the book [*Joyful Journey Listening to Immanuel*](#), the four authors discuss how "any life event that leads us to feeling alone without help can be experienced as traumatic." We may believe that God has abandoned us, even though the Bible says He has not.

In his study of the brain, [*Dr. Karl Lehman*](#) states that there are pain-processing pathways in our brains that our traumas need to process through in order for complete healing to occur. God needs to take us through these. If we don't allow Him to, unresolved pain in our lives causes us to search for relief—often in destructive, addictive ways. I discovered this firsthand while walking through the death of my second child. The first few months I was a mess. I couldn't eat or sleep, was angry, fought with my husband, and was a lost soul. Finally, I joined a Bible Study Fellowship class and that was the beginning of my healing process.

While, I can't fully address all the information here (the above book is short and well worth the read), it's important

to suffer well without being estranged from God. A few ways we can reignite our “Relational Circuits” with God in the midst of tragedy is through the practice of interactive gratitude, thought rhyming, and practicing appreciation. The book addresses all of these things in depth.

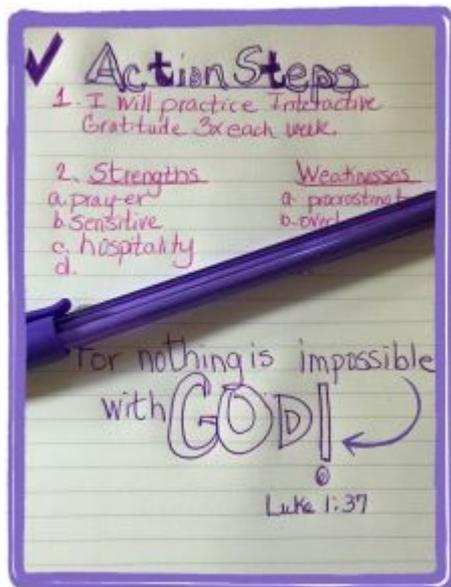
Summary

We have seen how not spending time with God, natural weaknesses, oppression, pride, and suffering can derail Christ-followers and cause us to fall into deep sin.

The good news is that all of these things are choices we make. (While we don't choose suffering, we can choose how we respond to it.) God has called us to holiness, and we can choose to live and walk that path. “For we are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit.” Romans 8:9.

Christ has not been stingy with us. In fact, Ephesians 1:3 tells us that He has given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm (think about that for a few minutes) to help us in life, which means He has certainly blessed us with the ability to overcome sin.

Action Steps To Be a Sin Overcomer



1. Make time for Jesus. We've already seen the damage that not spending time with Him can cause. Write down a specific goal: I will spend 10 minutes reading the Bible each day. I will learn Interactive Gratitude and practice it four times a week. I will pray for 15 minutes, and so on. Your goal should be measurable. **All of these things will give you an immune booster shot to sin.**
2. Identify your strengths and weaknesses. If you don't already know, ask God and a trusted friend to show you what your weaknesses are. Bill Hybels calls weaknesses we aren't aware of yet our "blind spots." **Write these down in a journal.** Then ask God to help devise a plan to shore these up and **write down the plan.** Consider counseling, mentoring, a Bible study group, an accountability partner, whatever it takes; put in the work to overcome your weaknesses and always be alert in these areas to attacks. Realize Satan will also attack us where we are strong. **So identify your strengths and write these down too and be alert to attacks.**
3. Practice taking every thought captive to Christ. Do not let strongholds form in your mind. **Write down and memorize Bible verses that speak to your areas of attack.** Actually speak God's truth over your life, your family, and your ministry. God's word is alive and active and sharper than a two-edged sword. It is much

stronger than the enemy, and it will protect your mind.

Step up, believer, and stand firm in the faith. God is faithful to finish what He has started in you.

What are your thoughts? Please share any ideas you have on overcoming sin.

To Do-ers List Back to School, Day 6: Obey the Rules

To Do-ers List: Back to School

Day 6: Obey the Rules!

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? Roman 6:16

To Doers List Slave to Fear

1. *test of a day!*
2. *study for quiz*
3. *park lunch*

When I was a little girl, I was embarrassed by something that happened in church one Sunday. It wasn't a big deal, but in my mind, I blew it up to big proportions until I feared that it would happen again. The fear grew out of control until I dreaded going to church. Unfortunately, fear became my go-to emotion in my life. When I finally conquered the fear from the original occurrence, another one quickly replaced it. The process of how I dealt with difficulties in my life was broken, and it was making me a slave to fear, which is actually a sin!

Call It What It Is

I did not realize that this now-established pattern in my life was a sin. And I certainly didn't realize that I was "obeying" it, but I was. It controlled many aspects of my life because I would go to great lengths to avoid the thing that created fear. And this was ever changing, ever growing; the talons of fear were firmly clasped around my throat, strangling the life out of me.

It wasn't until I gave my life to Christ that I learned to be obedient to Him and the truth of His word, and that is what bought me my freedom. It was a slow process because I had years of learned wrong behaviors. But as the Holy Spirit got a hold of my life, I switched my allegiance to the Life Giver, and He set me free.

How did He do this? Here's some of the things that helped.

- Attending church and absorbing the sermons
- Reading the Bible for myself
- Memorizing scripture that applied to my situation and repeating them aloud many times, speaking



them into the situation

- Praying and identifying another trusted person to pray for me
- Changing my thinking from focusing on lies to truth

- Listening to biblical teaching on fear
- Talking to those wiser than me

One thing I realized was that

[in order to be obedient to the truth, we have to know the truth.](#)



[Tweet This](#)

As we have already mentioned previously in this study, spending time with Jesus studying his word are crucial elements to becoming doers of the word. Mary told me about a little book called *A Gospel Primer for Christians, Learning to See the Glories of God's Love* by Milton Vincent that really helps the reader to rehearse who you are in Christ and the righteousness that is now yours. It may help you to firmly plant these truths in your mind and heart too. Here is a link to it on CBD. (OnlyByPrayer is an affiliate of CBD, so if you purchase this book from this link, we will receive a small profit from that).



[A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love](#)

By Milton Vincent / Focus Publishing To the Christians in Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome" (Romans 1:15). Evidently, Christians need to hear the gospel even after conversion. *A Gospel Primer for Christians* is designed to do just that. Use this book to preach the gospel to yourself on a daily basis, and be amazed at the difference it can make in your life!

For Today

Today let's identify if there are any areas of our lives where we are not obeying Jesus. Is there something that you need to let go of or give up? Is there an area that you've been trying to retain control of? Perhaps you're not even aware of it, as I was not. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to identify it and for the grace to hand it over. Then come up with a plan of how you will walk in freedom. List one or two things that you can do today to work for or maintain your freedom by obeying Jesus' rules.

Resources:

To help you organize your daily study and record your experiences, please download and print the following PDF, or download the journal app to your favorite Apple device.

- [To Do-ers List Study Guide PDF](#)
- [Days Lite: My Wonderful Life App](#) free app from App Store
- A Gospel Primer for Christians

Don't forget to comment on your experience in the comment section below! Choose your verse/s for today and be a Doer of the Word.

School is in session. *Obey the rules!*

Jane

Previous Sessions of To Do-ers

List, Back to School:

[Day 1: New Clothes](#)

[Day 2: The Book](#)

[Day 3: Pack a Lunch](#)

[Day 4: Listen to The Teacher](#)

[Day 5: Study!](#)

5 Ways to Pray in May



May brings blooming flowers and warmer temperatures as we shake

off the remnants of winter's cold and embrace new life. As you're busy with spring cleaning, wrapping up the school year,

and landscaping chores, remember to spend a few minutes each day with Only By Prayer praying for some of the following concerns.

1. **National Day of Prayer, May 7** – This year is the 64th annual National Day of Prayer. The theme for 2015 is Lord, Hear Our Cry. The emphasis is that people place their faith in the unfailing character of our Creator, who is sovereign over all. The scripture for this year is “Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day,” from 1 Kings 8:28. Let’s pray for our nation, our leaders, and our people that we will depend upon the Lord. We are facing challenges on every front: politically, morally, spiritually, and economically. We also see looming threats to our national security. With so much to pray about, we need to remember to intercede for our nation as often as possible. I’ve included resources below so that you can check to see what community events may be scheduled in your area.

Resources:

- [Prayer Guides and curriculum](#)
- Post or Find an event
- [National Prayer](#)

Verse: “Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day.” 1 Kings 8:28 NIV

Prayer: Lord, we intercede for our nation. We confess our sins of idolatry, abortion, pride, greed, perversions, jealousy, and hatred. We ask for your forgiveness. We pray that our nation will turn to you. We pray for your intervention in our lives. Please work as only You can to restore the moral fabric of our families, communities, states, and country. We ask for your hedge of protection around us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

2. **Mother's Day, May 10** – Some of us have mothers who are still with us and others of us do not. Perhaps we had/have a wonderful relationship with them, and maybe we didn't/don't. Whether your mother is currently living or has passed away, you can probably think of a woman who has been a stand-in mom to you and has encouraged you in your life in some way. Today is the day set aside to honor her. Let's think of a way to connect with our moms today. For those who live far away, perhaps it's a long phone call to chat and catch up. A handwritten card detailing what you love about her will touch any mother's heart. When my children were little and we lived in the area, we arranged a Mother's Day picnic at the local park for all the moms in our family. Need some more ideas? Here's some resources for you.

Resources:

- [Mother's Day Ideas](#)
- [Mom's Fill in the Blank Questionnaire](#)

*Verse: "Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."
Exodus 20:12 NIV*

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for our mothers. Even if the relationship is contentious, we acknowledge that they have given us the gift of life. We ask Your blessing upon our mothers. We pray for health and spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical healing where needed. May our relationships with them be strong and loving. As mothers, help us to be an example of Your love to our children. In Jesus' name. Amen.

3. **Pentecost, May 24** – Pentecost means "fiftieth day" (after Passover), and it is the day that the Holy Spirit came in tongues of fire and filled the believers. Acts chapter 2 tells of this powerful story. It is pivotal to our faith, because from that point on and to this day,

the Holy Spirit is the one who equips us, teaches us, and transforms us into Christ's likeness. Jesus could not be everywhere at the same time while He was on earth, but after The Resurrection, He sent the Holy Spirit who lives in each believer. What an amazing reality this is! We can ask ourselves if we are creating a welcoming home for the Spirit to reside in, or if we might be grieving Him through our behavior. Check out the resources below to delve further into this topic.

Resources:

- [Take 5, By My Spirit](#) by Mary Kane
- [Pentecost](#)

Verse: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

Prayer: Lord, we thank you that you have thought of everything to help your children to lead victorious lives. Help us to be filled with the Holy Spirit and equipped to live each day, not in our own power, but in yours. Help us to listen to His conviction and leading, confessing sin when we are at fault and following his prompting in other areas of our lives. Amen.

4. Memorial Day, May 25 – Memorial Day is the day set aside to honor those who died while in active military service. When I was a child, every year we celebrated Memorial Day two ways. First of all, we walked to our local cemetery where a service was held to honor the people from our city who died while in the military. It was a dignified ceremony, and even as a child, I felt the importance of remembering those who were no longer with us. Following that, we then attended the Memorial Day parade that went through the center of our little town. My sisters and I loved this parade and even participated in it as we got older through the Girl Scouts or as members of the marching band. Perhaps you do something similar. Here's a few

other ideas to celebrate this day:

Resources:

- [10 Memorial Day Celebrations That Are More Important ...](#)

Verse: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13

Prayer: Lord, help us to never take for granted those who have given their lives while serving our country, and therefore us. May we live our lives with intention, honor, and purpose in memory of those who sacrificed everything so that we can have such a precious freedom. May we teach these truths to our children and instill in them a spirit of gratitude for this country you have blessed us with. Amen.

5. **Supreme Court Justices** – Not nearly often enough do I stop to pray for these nine men and women who make such critical decisions concerning our nation. They decide cases they affect the very fabric of our lives and set the tone for the direction of our country. As you are reading this, one of the main issues that is being decided is the issue of gay marriage. A ruling is expected sometime during June of 2015.

Resources:

- [The Supreme Court Justices](#)
- [Gay Marriage Debate](#)

Verse: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." James 1:5 NIV

Prayer: Lord, we pray for wisdom for these men and women whose decisions reach far into our lives and set the tone of our nation. We ask that they would each have a heart for you and your concerns. We pray for discernment and clear thinking as

they puzzle through issues and ask questions. Please guard their hearts and minds. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thank you for praying with us today. Please feel free to share any of your prayers below in the comment section.

Pray on!

Jane

A special thank you to Amber Miller from Live and Laugh Loud for the use of her tulip photo.